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An Examination of an ESSAY *on the* DRAMATIC CHARACTER *of Sir* JOHN FALSTAFF. *By the Rev.* RICHARD STACK, *D.D. F.T.C.D. and M.R.I.A.*

Read Feb. 11, 1788.

THE eſſay, which I intend to examine, muſt be acknowledged to be one of the moſt ingenious pieces of criticiſm any where to be found: For though its deſign ſeems to be in contradiction to the general ſentiment of mankind, yet has the writer managed his ſubject with ſo much ability and addreſs, that ſome have been gained over to his opinion, others heſitate, and all muſt admire. We are pleaſed with his dexterity in ſupport of a paradox in the ſame manner as we are charmed with Falſtaff's wit and humour, even when employed in defence of his vices. In my opinion it is in a great meaſure owing to this entertaining eſſay, that, according to the writer's own words, " it ſhould now " be a queſtion, whether Falſtaff is or is not a man of courage." The ground upon which I ſtand with this expert antagoniſt, whether we conſider the ſuperiority of his talents or the novelty of his cauſe, is ſo unequal, indeed, that I ſhould avoid meeting him, if I could be influenced by any conſideration but a love of

 truth,

truth, and a deſire to fix what appears to me the true notion of the moſt delightful dramatic character ever drawn. I muſt therefore confeſs, that a *conſtitutional courage* does not ſeem to me any part of the *impreſſion* which Shakeſpear deſigned to give of Falſtaff's character: nor do I fear that ſuch a charge will tend to make us leſs delighted with this wonderful perſon, who contrives to render thoſe vices, which expoſe all others to hatred and contempt, principally and immediately ſubſervient to the purpoſes of mirth and humour. If I can weaken the force of the ingenious writer's arguments on the other ſide, I ſhall conſider my opinion as fully eſtabliſhed; for he has omitted nothing of any moment that could ſupport his ſingularity and refinement.

THE author introduces his eſſay with a diſtinction between the concluſions of the underſtanding formed upon actions, and the impreſſions upon a certain ſenſe ſomewhat like inſtinct, which immediately acquaints us with the principles of character without any conſideration of actions, and ſometimes determines our heart even againſt the concluſions of our reaſon. This obſervation he ſeems to apply in the preſent caſe thus: "The character of "Falſtaff has indeed ſtrong appearances of cowardice. In the "firſt moment of our acquaintance with him he is involved in "circumſtances of apparent diſhonour. We hear him familiarly "called coward by his moſt intimate companions. We ſee him "on occaſion of the robbery at Gadſhill in the very act of running "away from the prince and Poins: on another of more honourable "obligation, in battle and acting in his profeſſion as a ſoldier, "eſcaping from Douglas, even out of the world as it were; "counterfeiting death and deſerting his very exiſtence; betrayed "into

" into thoſe lies and braggadocios, which are the uſual concomi-
" tants of cowardice. But theſe appearances are only errors
" of the underſtanding; and the poet has contrived with infinite
" art to ſteal impreſſions upon his hearers or readers, that ſhall
" keep their hold in ſpite of theſe errors; yet ſo latent and ſo
" purpoſely obſcured, that we only feel ourſelves influenced by
" the effects without being able to explain the cauſe. Falſtaff, in
" ſpite of all thoſe ſtrong appearances, recommends himſelf to
" the heart by a conſtitutional courage: and the occaſions alluded
" to are only accidental imputations on this quality deſigned for
" ſport and laughter, on account of actions of apparent cowardice
" and diſhonour." The matter which I have here brought together into a ſhort view is ſubtle and refined. I may therefore be miſtaken; but after an attentive reading I can make no other application of his diſtinction between the concluſions of the underſtanding and thoſe mental impreſſions: and this I apprehend to be the true ſcope and ſubſtance of the author's criticiſm upon this part of the ſubject.

I AM willing then for the preſent to admit that all men are conſcious to themſelves of certain feelings about character, independent of and even in oppoſition to the concluſions of the underſtanding. And upon the ground of this very diſtinction I think it might be ſhewn, that Shakeſpear has deſigned cowardice, rather than conſtitutional courage, to be a part of Falſtaff's real character. When a character appeals to the underſtanding, the judgment formed of it ſeems to me the reſult of all its various parts compared together. Its ſeveral actions, with their ſeveral ſprings and motives, ſo far as reaſon can diſcover them, muſt

be

be taken into account before the underſtanding can form a juſt eſtimate. An accidental appearance or momentary impreſſion will not in this caſe give a proper view of the character, but the whole ſeries of conduct manifeſtly pointing to certain leading principles and regulated by them. A writer, therefore, with ſuch a deſign need not be very ſolicitous where or when circumſtances might fall in, which may be deemed exceptions to the principles that he meant to exhibit. For whether they appeared early or late, in this or that part of the character, they would upon the ſumming up of the whole be taken into the general account, and their weight would be determined by their true importance and relation to other matters. The underſtanding would then judge how far their operation extended, whether they were ſuch groſs violations of the principles as to be unnatural and improbable, or merely deviations from them, conſiſtent with the varieties uſually found in human nature.

But in addreſſing a character to the ſenſe or inſtinct abovementioned, the caſe appears entirely different. As no exerciſe is here given to the underſtanding to compare, digeſt and reflect, the firſt impreſſions are of the higheſt moment. The operation of this ſenſe, like that of other inſtincts, is inſtantaneous and ſtrong. It lays hold of the minuteſt circumſtances, and takes impreſſions from them which may not eaſily be effaced. It will not abide the ſlow proceſs of unfolding the character by degrees, ſuſpending its determinations upon the poſſible exiſtence of future matter, and coldly waiting on the judgment. In appealing to this ſenſe, the writer muſt be careful to introduce his character with impreſſions ſuitable to what he deſigns. If he does not give theſe in

in very ſtriking colours, we at leaſt expect ſome delicate touches to inform the ſenſe. Theſe obſervations I believe will be found to apply to moſt dramatic characters, and to Shakeſpear's moſt eminently. But if a writer ſhould neglect them, he would at leaſt avoid all early impreſſions of an oppoſite nature: for theſe might engage and miſlead the heart too far, and become the ſources of incorrigible errors. Can we ſuppoſe then that Shakeſpear, if he had deſigned to exhibit Falſtaff as naturally brave, would in the firſt ſcene of our acquaintance with him have given ſtrong intimations of his cowardice? which he has unqueſtionably done in the ſcheme laid for him by Poins, and in the obſervations made upon the probable conduct of Falſtaff. "The "virtue of this jeſt," ſays Poins, "will be the incomprehenſible "lies this ſame fat rogue will tell us when we meet at ſupper: "how thirty at leaſt he fought with; what wards, what blows, "what extremities he endured; and in reproof of this lies the "jeſt." All this clearly implies that he would play the firſt part of a coward in action, and the ſecond in lying and boaſting. And as if the poet were not content with theſe ſtrong appearances, grounded upon the opinion of Poins, Falſtaff's intimate companion, he appeals in the next ſcene to facts and the judgment of the ſpectator himſelf. There we ſee Falſtaff, with his three ſcurvy companions, put to flight by Hal and Poins, and hear him roaring for mercy. But as the queſtion of Falſtaff's courage muſt turn in a great meaſure upon theſe two ſcenes, I will examine the ingenious critic's elaborate vindication of him on theſe occaſions.

I DO not here inſiſt upon the critic's own implied admiſſion, that the ſcenes before us contain a weighty charge of cowardice. If he had not conſidered them as bearing hard upon his theory, he would ſcarcely have ſet aſide the very firſt ſcenes, in which Falſtaff appears, to the laſt. But let us ſee how he ſatisfies the reader, even with the advantage of theſe prejudices with which, not the poet, but the critic hath prepared his mind. In the firſt place, we are taught to entertain an ill opinion of Poins, as an unamiable, if not a bad and brutiſh character: and to conclude his conduct towards Falſtaff to have ariſen from malice and ill-will. I muſt own this is a new impreſſion of his character on me, who have been accuſtomed to view him as a wild and diſſipated fellow like the reſt of the party; and though he never failed to uſe Falſtaff as a butt, yet doing this without the leaſt malicious intent, and merely to draw out of him entertainment for the prince. To ſuppoſe that Poins contrived this plot with an ill-natured deſign, would greatly impair, if not utterly deſtroy its humour: nor can I diſcover throughout the whole character any thing to juſtify the cenſure here paſſed upon him, with a view, as it ſhould ſeem, to render his opinion ſuſpected. In the next place, the writer endeavours to prove Falſtaff's courage, even from the judgment of this Poins. When the prince ſays, "I "doubt they will be too hard for us." Poins replies, "Well, "for two of them, I know them to be as true-bred cowards as "ever turned back; and for the third, if he fight longer than "he ſees cauſe, I will forſwear arms." Upon this paſſage the criticiſm is remarkable. "As to the third, for ſo he deſcribes "Falſtaff, as if the name of this veteran would have excited too "ſtrongly the ideas of courage and reſiſtance, &c. &c." The

reaſon

reaſon here aſſigned for deſcribing rather than naming Falſtaff, is curious indeed; in truth, it is ſo ludicrous that I can hardly think the writer is in earneſt; Falſtaff's own rhodomantade cannot exceed it. But with reſpect to the real point here to be conſidered, viz. the diſtinction between Falſtaff and the others, the poet appears to have made it merely becauſe he was deſigned to be an extant character in the drama; for I am perſuaded the words in their original impreſſion convey no idea of valour, unleſs it be of its better part, diſcretion, which ſo highly diſtinguiſhed our hero. And I cannot but obſerve here again, that the conſtruction given to this paſſage by the able critic conſiderably leſſens its merit; for according to him, though ſpoken in the very ſpirit of detraction, it yet contains a reluctant admiſſion of his courage: whereas the paſſage, as commonly underſtood, is highly humorous; one of thoſe forms of expreſſion, which ſlily conveys a ſarcaſm under the guiſe of commendation.

The next ſcene is the preparation at Gadſhill for the robbery. In this we meet with two expreſſions that ſeem to reflect on Falſtaff's courage; the firſt, his exclamation upon hearing the number of the travellers, "Zounds! will they not rob us?" The ingenious writer defends his hero from this charge by ſaying, that the prince had uſed an expreſſion of ſimilar caution in the laſt ſcene, "I doubt they will be too hard for us." Let us examine both occaſions. The prince, reflecting that he and Poins were to be oppoſed to four men in arms, weighed the hazard of the jeſt with proper diſcretion; for had they proved too ſtrong for them, the joke might have turned out very ſeriouſly; or if not, Falſtaff's triumph would have been intolerable; his caution

was therefore wiſe and prudent. But was Falſtaff's nothing more, when upon hearing there were eight or ten travellers he exclaimed as he did? In his own party he found but ſix; and attentive only to ſuperior numbers, he ſeems to have loſt all other hope of ſuperior ſtrength; it never once occurred to him that his own party were provided, and the poor travellers unprepared for the attack. Here we ſee his mind alive to the remoteſt apprehenſion of danger, unable to collect itſelf and deprived of all manly reſource: nay, his imagination acts ſo ſtrongly, that he inſtantly fancies the characters of the parties interchanged, and that he was likely to ſuffer the very thing he came to execute. The ſecond point is the charge made upon him in conſequence of this by the prince, "What! a coward, Sir "John Paunch!" The defence ſet up here is his own reply, "I am not indeed John of Gaunt, your grandfather, but yet no "coward, Hal." It is alſo ſaid "to contain the true character "of Falſtaff, and to be thrown out here probably as a caution "to the audience not to take too ſadly, what was intended "only as argument for a week, laughter for a month, and a jeſt "for ever after." If this be the natural impreſſion of the anſwer, and not the very refinement of criticiſm, my ſentiments I muſt own are very miſtaken; for I have always conſidered it rather evading a charge, the force of which he had felt; and in this view of it there appears admirable addreſs, as by indirectly admitting the charge to a certain extent, and flattering the prince with the remembrance of his grandfather's proweſs and courage, he has contrived to diſarm him of his wit, and prevented him from urging matters to extremity.

But we have at laſt come to the field of action; here we ſee Falſtaff laying upon the poor helpleſs travellers without mercy; while he and his three companions are ſharing the booty, the prince and Poins come upon them and demand their money; the reſt run away; and Falſtaff, after a blow or two, runs away too, leaving the booty behind him. Here again the poet has diſtinguiſhed him from his raſcally companions, but he has not even condeſcended to give the argument of his courage, derived from this random blow or two, a place of higher dignity and obſervation than a marginal note; and it is by no means certain, or even probable, that the poet had any ſhare in this argument at all: it is more likely the note was a mere direction for the players, inſerted by the manager. And that we may clearly ſee the poet's own ſenſe of the tranſaction, let us hear the prince's remarks:

P. Hen. Got with much eaſe: now merrily to horſe;
The thieves are ſcattered, and poſſeſſed with fear
So ſtrongly, that they dare not meet each other.
——————— Falſtaff ſweats to death,
And lards the lean earth as he walks along:
Wer't not for laughing I ſhould pity him.
Poins. How the rogue roar'd!

The ingenious critic ſeems to doubt the truth of this reflection made upon him by Poins; but it is hardly conceivable that Poins would have made it without ſufficient grounds; and ſtill leſs ſo that the prince would have urged it again upon Falſtaff in a future ſcene uncontradicted, where we may obſerve he advances nothing but facts, and puts him down with a plain tale; ſo

 that

that his vindication here could only ariſe from a laudable zeal in the writer of queſtioning every thing which might reflect on the character of his hero.

The ſcene where the tranſaction at Gadſhill is canvaſſed is intimately connected with the former, and ſerves to throw much light upon it. The writer affirms, " that it is clearly the lies " only, not the cowardice of Falſtaff, which are here detected: " lies, to which, what there may be of cowardice is incidental " only, improving indeed the jeſt, but by no means the real " buſineſs of the ſcene." This is a kind of abſtraction which I muſt own myſelf incapable of making; neither do I well conceive how the writer has done ſo; for theſe lies could in fact have had no exiſtence, unleſs we imagine ſome foundation upon which they were raiſed; ſo that, as well in the order of our ideas as degree of importance, the cowardice of Falſtaff at Gadſhill is not incidental, but the primary and eſſential impreſſion. And this, or ſomething very like it, I think the writer admits in the following paſſage: " let us only ſuppoſe," ſays he, " that Falſtaff was a man of natural courage, though in all " reſpects unprincipled; but that he was ſurpriſed in one ſingle " inſtance into an act of real terror; which, inſtead of excuſing " upon circumſtances, he endeavours to cover by lies and brag- " gadocio; and that theſe lies become thereupon the ſubject, in " this place, of detection." Here the act of real terror is granted; Falſtaff appears before us in this ſcene under the weight of the charge, and put upon his vindication in the beſt manner he is able. His defence, indeed, amply diſplays another part of his character, already foretold by Poins; yet, ſurely, without diſcharging

charging the former impreſſion: on the contrary, both parts are naturally and cloſely connected; the ſuſpicion fixed upon him from the ſurrender of the booty, heightened by his own conſciouſneſs of his ſcurvy retreat, ſet his invention at work, and produced his vindication.

And here I cannot help obſerving that the ingenious critic's over-ſtrained defence of Falſtaff's courage does not make amends for the loſs of his inimitable wit and humour which have been ſacrificed on this occaſion. "Falſtaff's evaſions," ſays he, "here "fail him: he is at the end of his invention; and it ſeems fair, "that in defect of wit the law ſhould paſs upon him, and that "he ſhould undergo the temporary cenſure of that cowardice "which he could not paſs off by any evaſion whatever." Strange, indeed, that the writer ſhould diſcover a defect of wit in a ſcene where it ſeems to have triumphed with a more wonderful ſuperiority over ſurrounding difficulties than in any other part of his dramatic character. Let us attend for a moment to the occaſion: when Falſtaff had finiſhed his incomprehenſible lies about the exploit at Gadſhill, the prince ſuddenly puts him down with a plain tale, of which poor Jack could not deny a ſyllable. In this ſtate of embarraſſment we feel a peculiar intereſt about him, not conceiving how his wit, though variable and inexhauſtible, could extricate him, when on a ſudden, with a ſort of charm, he ſets both us and himſelf free. To the ſarcaſm of Poins: "Come, let us hear, Jack, what trick haſt thou now?" he replies, "By the L—d I knew you as well as he that made you," and then profeſſes himſelf a coward upon inſtinct. Nothing can be more exquiſite and delightful; it is not cutting the intricate

tricate knot, but unfolding it with a wonderful ſleight and characteriſtic eaſe. His adverſaries, who were taunting and bitter enough, have nothing to reply to this explanation. He ſeems to feel his victory complete, when he adds, " But, lads, I am " glad you have the money: hoſteſs, clap to the doors; watch " to-night, pray to-morrow, &c." The prince, it is true, replies to his propoſal for having a play extempore. " Content; " and the argument ſhall be thy running away." From which, by the way, we may ſee the point of cowardice was a main object of the ſcene; and this is confirmed both by Falſtaff's confeſſion and manner of accounting for it, and alſo by his concluding reply to the prince in this ſcene. " Ah, no more of " that, Hal, if thou lov'ſt me." Upon the whole, the lies do not appear to be the ſole, nor even the principal object of this ſcene; the plot was originally contrived upon a previous conjecture from his character, that he would firſt act the coward and next the liar: the affair at Gadſhill juſtified the opinion of Poins as to both, and the preſent occaſion goes to their joint conviction: and yet thus convicted he baffles every attempt; the verſality of his wit and gaiety of his humour delight and ſurpriſe us, ſo ſucceſsfully does he play with thoſe weapons which other hands dare not touch.

I HAVE gone pretty largely into an examination of thoſe firſt ſcenes of Falſtaff's appearance, becauſe I cannot help thinking that the poet deſigned them to be of great importance in impreſſing his character: and I have examined the impreſſions, not in the order aſſigned them by the ingenious critic, but that in which they aroſe under the hands of the poet. Theſe firſt appearances,

appearances, ſo far as they affect his courage, the critic maintains to be errors of the underſtanding; in ſpite of which, impreſſions of a very minute and delicate nature, adapted to the critical ſenſe alluded to above, gain upon the heart and preſerve their hold. Now, in my opinion, thoſe early impreſſions are rather notices to that ſenſe, and any following appearances that may ſeem contradictory to them, I ſhould incline to call errors of the underſtanding. My meaning is ſimply this: the early impreſſions of Falſtaff's ſpirit are certainly thoſe of cowardice; the heart I think ſoon reckons this among the number of his infirmities, and whatever appearances ariſe in the courſe of his dramatic life, which might ſeem inconſiſtent with them, cannot eaſily make their way to the heart, already prediſpoſed; ſo that if there be any ſuch they would have leſs influence to determine the whole impreſſion of his character, as they have been delayed to be brought forward.

WHETHER there be any ſuch, remains to be enquired: and here I ſhall follow the able critic upon his own plan.

HE firſt conſiders what impreſſions Sir John Falſtaff made on the characters of the drama, and in what eſtimation he is ſuppoſed to ſtand with mankind in general as to the point of perſonal courage. His firſt authorities are Snare, the conſtable, and Hoſteſs Quickly. "It may chance," ſays Snare, "to coſt ſome "of us our lives, for he will ſtab."

HOSTESS. "Alaſs, the day, take heed of him: he ſtabbed me "in mine own houſe, and that moſt beaſtly; he cares not what "miſchief

" miſchief he doth, if his weapon be out; he will foin like " any devil: he will ſpare neither man, woman nor child." This paſſage might have been as well omitted; it ſeems to be one of thoſe where the poet has ſhewn too great a compliance with the vicious manners of the times: but ſuppoſing it had no indecent alluſion, what inſight do theſe expreſſions give into his character? evidently nothing more than this; that Falſtaff would not much ſcruple at ſhedding blood, a property ſurely belonging more to a coward than a brave man: and what are we to think of his attacking the perſon of a woman? In ſhort, one would rather conclude theſe paſſages, if ſerious, to be an indication of treachery and violence than of true courage. And what was his conduct when they attempted to arreſt him? It does not appear that he made any active defence on his own part. He cries out, " Away, varlets—draw, Bardolph—cut me off the " villain's head—throw the quean in the kennel." And again, " Keep them off, Bardolph." All this, I ſay, looks not only as if he had felt no ſufficient reſource in himſelf, but as if he committed the main action to his ſcurvy companion; nor does there appear any thing in the whole ſcene that argues the leaſt ſpirit in him, whether we judge from the ſentiments of Snare and Quickly, or his own conduct in the tranſaction.

On another occaſion his wench, Doll Tearſheet, aſks him when he will leave fighting, and patch up his old body for heaven? It was at his return from having routed Piſtol. We may judge of this feat from Falſtaff's own account of this Piſtol. " He's no " ſwaggerer, Hoſteſs, a tame cheater he; you may ſtroke him " as gently as a puppy greyhound; he will not ſwagger with a

" Barbary

" Barbary hen, if her feathers turn back in any ſhew of re-
" ſiſtance." The critic himſelf appears to rely very little upon this proof of his courage, but endeavours to draw another from Falſtaff's expreſſion: " A raſcal bragging ſlave; the rogue fled
" from me like quickſilver." " Which words," ſays the critic, " as
" they remember the cowardice of Piſtol, ſeem to prove that
" Falſtaff did not value himſelf on the adventure." This I think is a refinement: the plain and obvious impreſſion is nothing more than that the raſcal had teazed them with his bragging and bombaſt, and that Falſtaff had put him to flight for it. If any thing further be ſought in the words, I ſhould rather think his expreſſion, " the rogue fled from me like quickſilver," an attempt to reflect a luſtre on his own proweſs, in repreſenting Piſtol as impreſſed with ſo great terror.

THE next appeal is to Juſtice Shallow, who had known him when a boy and page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk. He ſaw him break Schogan's head at the court gate, when he was a crack not thus high. The critic ſuppoſes this Schogan to be ſome boiſterous fencer, for what reaſon we know not. It is much more probable that he was ſome jeſter or buffoon about the court. There was one of his name in Edward the IVth's time, whoſe jeſts were now in the mouths of every body; and in all likelihood Shakeſpear has applied the name of this eminent buffoon to ſome one of a ſimilar character and profeſſion in Henry's time. Shallow ſays that Falſtaff was a good backſwords man; which might have been the caſe without his poſſeſſing true courage, as it is at this day the caſe with many a good fencer: but in fact the whole teſtimony of this Maſter Shallow is a

miſerable ſupport; he was not only a poor, weak ſilly creature, but had the abſurd vanity of being thought a hero in his day. Nothing then could be more natural than for ſuch a fellow to puff the characters of his own time, and particularly of his acquaintance. Though he was forlorn, as well in ſpirit as in perſon, we hear him mix an account of his own feats with Falſtaff's, and we may well imagine that he was diſpoſed to exaggerate both. "Lord, Lord," ſays Falſtaff, "how ſubject "we old men are to this vice of lying! this ſame ſtarved Juſtice "hath done nothing but prate to me of the wildneſs of his "youth; and every third word a lie, duer paid to the hearer "than the Turk's tribute." He had juſt wit enough to know that an intimacy with wild and daring ſpirits in his youth might give him ſome character, and that his lies of himſelf, unleſs accompanied with equal praiſes of his companions, could not poſſibly eſcape detection. We "ſee to the bottom of Maſter Shal-"low" in this caſe; nor is the ſmalleſt credit due to the teſtimony of the bragging fool.

ANOTHER ſentiment in his favour is ſought for in the miſtaken account given by Lord Bardolph of the battle of Shrewſbury. "The king, by this account, was wounded; the prince of Wales "and the two Blunts ſlain; certain nobles, whom he names, "had eſcaped by flight; and Harry Monmouth's brawn, the hulk, "Sir John Falſtaff, was taken priſoner." Hence the writer would conclude that Sir John was a ſoldier of good fame; otherwiſe he would not have had a place in this liſt. But this ſtrikes me in a very different light; I am rather inclined to think that the poet has mentioned him in this place and company, deſigning him

him through the whole to be a very principal figure in the drama; and, beſide that he was a very remarkable perſonage for his form, his wit, and many other entertaining qualities, he was univerſally known to be a conſtant follower of the prince; ſo that we might have reaſonably expected ſome mention of him on the occaſion. Whether the notice taken of him be reſpectful or otherwiſe, is, I think, no queſtion; nor can I help thinking that in thus leaving him behind thoſe who had eſcaped by flight, the poet might have intended to convey an impreſſion of his being unable to follow ſo faſt as the reſt, and that his captivity was owing to his corpulence.

One ſhould hardly think that the ingenious critic would attempt to draw an argument for Falſtaff's courage from the mouth of the prince, who ſeems to take a pride in girding at his cowardice on every occaſion. The prince ſays, " I will procure this fat " rogue a charge of foot." And again, " I will procure thee, " Jack, a charge of foot; meet me to-morrow in the Temple hall." Both expreſſions ſeem to have been uſed with a view to harraſs and teaze him, by putting him upon a ſervice for which he was ſo unfit. We are told with much gravity, " that a prince of ſo " great ability, whoſe wildneſs was only external and aſſumed, " would not have procured in ſo nice and critical a conjuncture, " a charge of foot for a known coward." But what was this weighty charge? Why, no more than was barely enough to ſupport the importance of his dramatic character, one hundred and fifty men of his own raiſing. This wiſe young prince does not appear to have been aware that the fat rogue would miſuſe the king's preſs damnably; in truth, the thought probably never

 entered

entered into his head, at leaſt gave him no concern. Falſtaff ought to appear in the battle, and could not well aſſume a character below that of a commander: beſides, this very capacity furniſhes matter of excellent wit and humour, which very naturally accounts for the introduction of him on this and other occaſions; and I muſt obſerve that the critic ſeems to have overlooked this remark too much, in ſearch of thoſe ſubtle and remote impreſſions on which he has formed his theory. What was the conduct of the prince, when he had actually diſcovered this groſs abuſe of the king's preſs? One might expect from his wiſdom and ability to hear a moſt ſevere rebuke, or even to find Sir John very gravely caſhiered; but the ſame vein of humour and entertainment which procured him his commiſſion ſtill continues. "Tell me, Jack," ſays the prince, "whoſe fellows are theſe that "come after?

Falſtaff. "Mine, Hal. mine.

P. Henry. "I did never ſee ſuch pitiful raſcals.

Falſtaff "Tut, tut, good enough to toſs; food for powder; "they'll fill a pit as well as other men: Tuſh, man, mortal "men, mortal men." And again, "Faith, for their poverty I "know not where they had that; and for their bareneſs, I am "ſure they never learned that of me.

P. Henry. "No, I'll be ſworn, unleſs you call three inches on "the ribs bare."

THE writer's encomium on the wiſdom of the prince anticipates the matter a little too ſoon; at this period, and for ſome time after, he never mixes a ſerious thought in his conduct to Falſtaff: And I am ſure the dignity of his princely character would have ſuffered more from this incongruous mixture of levity and ſobriety, of buſineſs and diſſipation, of virtue and vice, than by his appearing "a while to uphold the unyoked humour of his idleneſs." The ſeverity of that poetic juſtice, which alone can make us endure with any patience the prince's final treatment of his old companion, cannot be ſo well maintained, if we ſuppoſe him to have done at times good ſervice to the ſtate, as to have been uniformly worthleſs and profligate.

THE next evidence produced is no leſs a perſon than the chief juſtice of England; who tells Falſtaff, "that his day's ſervice at "Shrewſbury had gilded over his night's exploit at Gadſhill." "This," ſays the writer, "is ſurely more than common fame. "The chief juſtice muſt have known his whole character taken "together, and muſt have received authentic information, and "in the trueſt colours, of his behaviour in that action." But how was this at all neceſſary? It no where appears that the chief juſtice was deeply verſed or concerned in matters of ſtate; his judicial character is all we are acquainted with; and from the dignified integrity with which he has diſcharged it, we have reaſon to imagine that it engaged his whole attention. Falſtaff was brought forward to his notice, as concerned in the robbery at Gadſhill. In this light he came directly within his juriſdiction: as to his military conduct, he was probably quite ignorant. The very point before us, his knowledge of Falſtaff's ſervices at Shrewſbury,

Shrewſbury, appears to have been ſuggeſted in this ſcene, and almoſt in the ſame words by the ſervant waiting on the chief juſtice.

Chief Juſtice. " What's he that goes there?

Servant. " Falſtaff, a'nt pleaſe your lordſhip.

Chief Juſtice. " He that was in queſtion for the robbery?

Servant. " He, my lord; but he hath ſince done good ſervices " at Shrewſbury."

It would have been wholly impertinent to have put this obſervation into the mouth of the waiting gentleman, if the chief juſtice be ſuppoſed to have been circumſtantially acquainted with the military character of every officer. The natural impreſſion of the paſſage is, in my opinion, clearly this: he had known him as a criminal when there were matters againſt him for his life; the buſineſs was huſhed up through the interference of the prince, and Falſtaff was ſent off to the wars. Upon his return, the chief juſtice meets him, and is informed that ſince his former miſconduct he had done good ſervice. The whole ſcene can be perfectly accounted for in this way; and to reſort to any foreign matter, upon a ſuppoſition of the chief juſtice's acquaintance with his whole character, is as unneceſſary as it is forced and unnatural. The introduction of Falſtaff into the royal preſence, and the eager ſearch after him to bring him to court, amount in my mind to very ſlender evidence of his reſpectability as a counſellor

counſellor or a ſoldier. All this, I think, was deſigned to throw a buſtle and importance round his character. There is nothing, indeed, ſo very ſtrange or indecent in his attending the prince in the camp at Shrewſbury; where, by the way, we may obſerve he gives no ſort of advice, but mixes his humour with their moſt important councils. Can any one ſeriouſly imagine that he was called into the king's preſence from a regard to his merit? If there were any reaſon for introducing him, it was probably to raiſe a laugh againſt the rebels; but, indeed, I look upon his preſence as a matter of courſe, a part of the prince's train, who was too fond of his company to ſacrifice it to every little punctilio of decorum. Beſides, if the king be ſuppoſed to have known any thing of Falſtaff, his corrupting of the prince, his licentious manners and ſcandalous debaucheries muſt have been at leaſt as notorious as his pretended military merit; and therefore it would have been equally indecent to give him the ſanction of his countenance, as if he were the moſt arrant coward. The ingenious writer will anſwer, "That in camps there is but one virtue "and one vice: military merit ſwallows up or covers all." Whatever force might be in this obſervation, made in the field at large, I apprehend that it cannot apply in the preſent inſtance. A king unconcerned in Falſtaff's moral character, might, in public emergencies, overlook his vices that he may profit by his talents. But king Henry was deeply affected by the prince's looſe behaviour, and by the rude and barren ſociety to which he reſigned himſelf. We have abundant proof of this in his whole conduct, particularly in his pathetic addreſſes to him. It would therefore be an inſult on his majeſty to bring "that reverend vice, that father "ruffian," before him with any ſerious deſign. Here, indeed, would

would be a real indecorum in forcing him as it were upon the king's attention; whereas at preſent there is none, as he may well be ſuppoſed to eſcape his obſervation.

I HAVE now gone through an examination of all thoſe opinions, which the writer has advanced as in this reſpect the ſtrength of his cauſe, Colville's excepted, which ſhall be conſidered preſently. The opinions of the prince and Poins he admits to contain ſtrong appearances the other way, and therefore he reſerved them for the end of his work. I have followed the order of the poet for reaſons aſſigned above. Thoſe which now remain for me are Colville's and Lancaſter's, and they are connected in one tranſaction.

WHEN the rebel army, by the treachery of Lancaſter, had been diſperſed and purſued by the royal troops, Falſtaff comes up with his priſoner, Sir John Colville, and is thus addreſſed by Lancaſter:

> " Now, Falſtaff, where have you been all this while?
> " Theſe tardy tricks of yours will, on my life,
> " One time or other break ſome gallows back.

THE writer employs great addreſs to ſhew from various circumſtances that we ought to give a very qualified credit to any thing advanced by this " cold, reſerved ſober-blooded boy." " His " temper might lead him to injure a frank unguarded man of " wit and pleaſure; a little cruelty and injuſtice toward a man " of diſtinguiſhed wit and noted poverty, might be accounted " to Lancaſter a virtue in the eye of the grave and prudent part " of

" of mankind: the tone of the court was ſtrongly againſt Falſtaff
" as the miſleader of the young prince: ſomething, therefore,
" that would not too much offend the prince, yet leave behind
" a diſgraceful ſcar upon Falſtaff, was very ſuitable to the temper
" and ſituation of parties and affairs." My objection to theſe remarks, as indeed to the general ſcheme and tenor of the whole criticiſm, is their exceſſive refinement. Dramatic characters are not drawn for ſpeculative ingenious men in their cloſets, but for mankind at large. Now, I ſay, theſe fine-ſpun deductions from the temper and ſituation of Lancaſter and the reſt of the parties, even though they could be made out to our ſatisfaction, have not a ſtrong and immediate influence: the part of his character which we know, however unamiable, does not, I think, excite thoſe impreſſions of courſe: and for the moſt part arguments from one part of character to another, unleſs the connection be univerſally acknowledged, is too philoſophical a buſineſs for the public underſtanding. We had better, therefore, examine Falſtaff's own defence. " I never knew yet," ſays he, " but rebuke and
" check was the reward of valour. Do you think me a ſwallow,
" an arrow, or a bullet? Have I in my poor and old motion
" the expedition of thought? I have ſpeeded hither with the
" extremeſt inch of poſſibility. I have foundered nineſcore and
" odd poſts: and here, travel-tainted as I am, have, in my pure
" and immaculate valour, taken Sir John Colville of the dale,
" a moſt furious knight and valorous enemy. But what of that?
" He ſaw me and yielded; that I may juſtly ſay with the
" hook-noſed fellow of Rome—I came, ſaw and overcame.

Lancaſter. " It was more of his courteſy than your de-
" ſerving.

Falſtaff. " I know not: here he is, and here I yield him, &c."

It is pleaſant enough to think how this defence has impreſſed the writer. " Falſtaff," ſays he, " anſwers the general effect of " Lancaſter's ſpeech by a feeling and ſerious complaint of in-" juſtice. He then goes on to apply his defence to the vindication " both of his diligence and courage; but he deſerts by degrees " his ſerious tone, and taking the handle of pleaſantry which " Lancaſter had held forth to him, he is prudently content, as " being ſenſible of Lancaſter's high rank and ſtation, to let the " whole paſs off in buffoonery and humour." Here again, I think we ſee a ſolemn air thrown round this buſineſs, and eſpecially the character of Falſtaff, which the poet never deſigned. Lancaſter, in the firſt inſtance, is made to play off the deep and ſubtle politician, for the purpoſe of ruining Falſtaff and recommending himſelf to the court. Then Falſtaff, perceiving the malice of his intent, begins a ſerious vindication of himſelf, which he might have continued to the end, had not Lancaſter by chance given him a handle of pleaſantry, and had it not been ſafer to paſs it off in a joke. Every thing here appears to me uncharacteriſtic in the higheſt degree. The writer ſeems to have loſt ſight of the true intent of Falſtaff's character, which ſurely never was to excite ſentiments of jealouſy and malice, but to entertain the whole world, even thoſe who were objects of his wit and humour. " Men of all ſorts," ſays he, " take a " pride to gird at me. The brain of this fooliſh-compounded
" clay,

" clay, man, is not able to invent any thing that tends to " laughter more than I invent, or is invented on me: I am " not only witty in myſelf, but the cauſe that wit is in other " men." Here we have his very eſſence: and it was with a view to this, that every inimitable ſcene, in which he appears, was contrived by the wonderful poet. But to return: We may obſerve that Lancaſter's charge has a reference to former miſconduct of a like nature. His opinion had evidently been formed before this occaſion; and therefore if Falſtaff could even account for his tardy tricks in the preſent caſe, it would have only proved that his conduct was now leſs blameable than uſual. As to his defence I cannot think he meant it to be rational and ſober. We find in it the ſame humorous extravagance as in every other narrative of his exploits. The fact, indeed, was true, that Sir John Colville had ſurrendered to him; but it does not appear from any teſtimony, except his own and Falſtaff's, that he was a man of courage; and if he even were, the circumſtances of the tranſactions, in my opinion, give Falſtaff very little to boaſt of perſonal bravery. The rebel army had been betrayed and diſſipated. In this ſituation of affairs, the reſiſtance of a brave officer, deſerted by his troops, would have been utterly fruitleſs, ſo that there was no great hazard in the attack. The dialogue between the knights, from which the critic would infer, that his hero's name was ſo terrible to the enemy, conveys not to my mind the beſt idea of his courage. Had this been the poet's deſign would he have given him ſuch ſentiments as theſe? " Do ye yield, Sir? Or ſhall I ſweat for you? If I do ſweat, " they are drops of thy lovers, and they weep for thy death; " therefore rouſe up, fear and trembling, and do obſervance to

 " my

" my mercy." By the way what becomes of the critic's nice diſtinction between boaſting before and after events; for upon this diſtinction he relies greatly, when ſpeaking of Falſtaff's bragging lies after the affair of Gadſhill. Colville's reply to this ſtrange rhodomantade is, " I think you are Sir John Falſtaff, and " in that thought yield me." If Falſtaff's ſpeech determined Colville's mind, he muſt have been an arrant coward; if not, his queſtion was the mere formality of honour, requiring an aſſurance that he was going to ſurrender to a man of ſome rank and name. At this day the point is ſometimes inſiſted upon, and certainly prevailed more generally in times of knight-errantry, when the dignity of knighthood was held in higher eſtimation than at preſent. Colville was ſo circumſtanced, that he muſt in prudence have yielded to the commoneſt ſoldier in the field; but it was a conſolation to know that he fell into the hands of a perſon of equal rank with himſelf, and at the ſame time it was an act of courteſy upon which the knights of old piqued themſelves. In this view Lancaſter's obſervation is juſtified. " It was " more of his courteſy than your deſerving." Falſtaff's reply, " I know not; there he is, and there I yield him, &c." is a clear admiſſion of its truth. Lancaſter's opinion of his general character for backwardneſs in the field is clear and deciſive: and Colville's behaviour is eaſily accounted for without aſcribing it to the terror of his name. The whole incident ſeems to have been choſen with great art by the poet. Poor Jack had hitherto been found in his military capacity under circumſtances of diſgrace. How he would conduct himſelf as a conqueror ſtill remained to be ſhewn. And here Shakeſpear's contrivance is inimitable; he has prediſpoſed matters in ſuch a way as that he

he ſhould obtain his victory *ſine pulvere*, and what is more ſtrange, *ſine ſudore*; and at the ſame time he has furniſhed appearances, which Falſtaff might turn to his advantage in his account of this exploit. Had Falſtaff's military conduct been praiſe-worthy or indifferent on former occaſions, or had there been any thing of real courage in the tranſaction before us, Lancaſter's imputation had been imprudent and prepoſterous in the extreme; and Falſtaff's vindication might have brought the malice of his commander to open ſhame in the face of the whole army. This too might have been done with his uſual pleaſantry and wit; but there is no ſuch thing. As the victory was but a ceremony, ſo his defence is but a *jeſt*.

THE writer makes an appeal likewiſe to facts. Let us ſee how far theſe eſtabliſh his courage. We have had occaſion to examine ſome already, the affair of Gadſhill and others, that incidentally occurred in treating of opinions. At the battle of Shrewſbury Falſtaff is introduced ſpeaking thus in ſoliloquy: "I have led my ragamuffins where they are peppered; there's "not three of my hundred and fifty alive." In reading this paſſage it never occurred to me to ſuppoſe that Falſtaff choſe for himſelf the deſperate ſcene of action here deſcribed; it ſeems utterly inconſiſtent with that better part of valour, called diſcretion, of which he was ſo great a maſter on all other occaſions, nay in this very battle. "But there is no queſtioning the fact he "had led them." I am not at all ſure that we are obliged or even warranted to abide a literal conſtruction, which violates all probability. The writer may ſay, this is taking for granted what is to be proved, Falſtaff's cowardice. But I think it as in-

conſiſtent with his own Falſtaff as with mine. Some things prove a great deal too much, and ſo loſe their credibility. John of Gaunt himſelf could not do more than this; and who can believe an account of ſuch romantic bravery in Sir John Falſtaff, in a man who the moment after counterfeits death to eſcape a ſingle adverſary? It cannot be. Shakeſpear never could have committed ſo great a breach of decorum; for though not the ſtricteſt obſerver of it in all caſes, yet no dramatic poet ever obſerved it more perfectly in character. I ſhould therefore rather adopt the idea of his having *ordered* his ragamuffins upon this dangerous ſervice: or if this be thought a ſtraining of the words too far, that having led them, he there left them. There is certainly no reaſon to think that at the time of his making this ſoliloquy, he is at or near the ſcene of action; the reverſe is obviouſly to be inferred: either therefore he never was upon the ſpot, or he had, agreeably to his conduct on every occaſion of danger, prudently conſulted for his ſafety by a timely retreat. Does the ingenious critic really think that Falſtaff had held his poſt till he had witneſſed the fact in queſtion? The improbability of it is too groſs, and he ſeems aware of this when he admits that Falſtaff might have exaggerated the danger. Under this idea he ſets about correcting Falſtaff's account, and reduces the number to two-thirds of the whole. I ſay nothing at preſent of his thus accommodating facts, related in ſoliloquy, to his own fanciful theory, though he denies this liberty to others. We might ſay to him, "the fact cannot be queſtioned." But in truth I can as eaſily believe one account as the other. If Falſtaff's diſcretion had ſlept on its poſt till two-thirds of his men were killed, it might have remained ſo till three only ſurvived, or in

my

my opinion to the day of judgment. The truth is, it was awake early in the action, and ſuſpecting that ſcene to be a little too diſturbed for keeping a good look out, it choſe ground of more advantage. I believe this to be the natural and almoſt univerſal impreſſion of the paſſage.

We come next to examine his action with Douglas. The writer has urged a great deal of matter on this head, and made juſt diſtinctions between courage and honour. But, indeed, the text is too plain to be obſcured or refined away by his comments. By comparing Falſtaff's conduct on this occaſion with his words on another, we may diſcover ſuch a contradiction as ſhews it did not ariſe from any ſettled principle, *v. g.* a contempt of honour. "If Percy be alive," ſays he, "I'll pierce him—If "he do come in my way, ſo—If he do not—if I come in his, let "him make a carbonado of me." Suppoſe this to have been ſpoken by a perſon poſſeſſed of conſtitutional courage, we might reaſonably expect that although he would by no means ſeek danger, yet he would meet it, if neceſſary, with ſome degree of firmneſs. But how does Falſtaff's conduct anſwer this expectation? In the moment of danger he counterfeits death. When the writer advances this as a proof of a collected mind, I think he is run very hard indeed; for unleſs we ſuppoſe that fear ſuſpends all action, and locks up every faculty of the mind, (which very ſeldom happens) we muſt admit Falſtaff's reſource to have been very natural for a coward. But if we ſuppoſe the leading idea in his mind during the battle to be a ſtrong ſenſe of perſonal danger, the paſſage juſt now quoted and his conduct are eaſily reconciled. "If Percy be alive, I'll pierce him." Theſe words,

words, I believe, nobody conſiders as ſpoken with any view except to the pun. What follows them implies, that if Percy ſhould come in his way, he can't help it; he muſt abide the conſequence; every man's deſtiny awaits him; but that he will avoid it as long as he can. With this impreſſion of his character we ſee his behaviour in this ſcene with Douglas is very natural; the readineſs of his wit ſupplies him with an expedient, and he baffles his adverſary as he always does. But neither the quickneſs of his invention on this occaſion, nor his ſporting with danger on others, prove a conſtitutional courage; they only ſhew an inexhauſtible vein of wit and humour predominating through every part of his character; triumphant over every thing, over calamity, danger and diſgrace; and we might as well aſſert, that he was inſenſible to all the miſeries of poverty, infamy and diſeaſe, when we hear him ſporting with thoſe diſmal ſubjects, as ſuppoſe him courageous for expreſſing his ſenſe of danger in a witty form. At the moment we feel him a coward, we are delighted with his humour amid ſurrounding dangers; for we know and feel that habits of character break out upon the moſt unlikely occaſions; and that habit above all others, I believe, which we are now conſidering. I have heard of inſtances of its fantaſtic ſport in the extremes of violent grief, and even at the hour of death. And ſurely if ever there was a wit which could tinge every affection and paſſion of the ſoul with its gay colours, it was the inimitable vein of Falſtaff, which converts every thing it touches to gold.

What remains behind of this ſcene is, in my humble opinion, a damning proof of Falſtaff's cowardice, his ſtabbing Percy after his

his death. The critic calls this indecent, but ſays it has nothing to do with his courage. I think otherwiſe. This is one of thoſe caſes where a certain principle of action, beſide its own immediate effects, draws after it other conſequences which have a very near affinity with it; the connection between the primary and ſecondary actions is here inſeparable. To run away armed from a living man, or to eſcape by counterfeiting death, are direct acts of cowardice. To ſtab a dead man is equally ſo, though not directly. For I aſk, is it poſſible for ſuch an idea to enter into the mind of a brave man? or of any man, except the baſeſt coward? I am not ſure whether the charge of cowardice, ſo inferred, be not full as ſtrong as any can be, though founded upon a direct and immediate courſe of action. This, I ſay, ſuppoſing the action to be cowardly by inference only; but perhaps this would be conceding too much, if we conſider Falſtaff's avowed motive on this occaſion: " I am afraid," ſays he, " of " this gunpowder Percy, though he be dead; therefore I'll make " him ſure: yea and I'll ſwear I killed him. Why may he not " riſe as well as I? Nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody " ſees me; therefore, ſirrah, with a new wound in your thigh, " come you along with me." Hence it appears that he ſtabbed him partly for the full aſſurance of his own perſonal ſafety, although his apprehenſions were in themſelves ſo groundleſs and improbable, that none but a coward's heart could entertain them. The writer has with delicate judgment ſlurred this matter over; and I wiſh his whimſical theory had not obliged me to unfold an action of ſuch a nature, but there was no paſſing it by, for it ſpeaks too plainly the poet's deſign as to the character.

I HAVE now gone through every thing in this ingenious eſſay which appears to bear upon the matter in queſtion. I dare not promiſe myſelf that what I have offered will oe deemed an anſwer. The limits of ſuch an eſſay as I now preſent to the academy would not allow me to treat it more at large; and what is a more important difficulty, the advocates are not fairly matched. I have only one or two obſervations more to offer on the ſubject.

THE firſt I would make has, indeed, occaſionally occurred, and was pretty conſtantly in my view in the courſe of the eſſay, viz. in what manner each hypotheſis would affect the eſſential qualities of Falſtaff's character. I have endeavoured to ſhew that a great and delightful portion of his wit and humour would be loſt if we were to adopt the writer's idea; and, indeed, he himſelf has ſacrificed them to his theory in one of the moſt perfect ſcenes of the whole character. This I conſider as a radical error, for which all his ingenuity cannot atone. I muſt next obſerve, that to accommodate his theory, falſe opinions of Poins, Lancaſter and others, muſt be reſorted to, and ſyſtems of malice intermixed in the plot, which certainly the poet never deſigned. Theſe are not only in themſelves miſtakes of character, but have a powerful influence on the plot, and ſuch an one as I think takes away a great deal from its real pleaſantry and good humour. Another ſtrong objection to the writer's criticiſm is, that he often miſtakes the true intent of thoſe ſcenes where Falſtaff is introduced. The occaſions are contrived as productive of mirth; every incident conſiſtent with the plot which conduced beſt to this end is choſen by the poet; but the critic

ſeems

ſeems to have overlooked this principal view in queſt of ſubtle impreſſions; and while we are enjoying the feaſt of wit and humour, he is refining. Had Shakeſpear ſometimes violated decorum a little to attain his end, we might excuſe him for the entertainment he affords: but I am far from admitting this; and have attempted to maintain, through my remarks, that the new theory is more deſerving of the charge. My next reflection goes upon a difficulty ſtarted by the writer upon the uſual judgment of Falſtaff's character. "There is ſomething ſtrangely "incongruous," ſays he, "in our diſcourſe and affections con- "cerning him. We all like old Jack; yet by ſome ſtrange "perverſe fate, we all abuſe him and deny him the poſſeſſion "of any one good or reſpectable quality. There is ſomething "extraordinary in this. It muſt be a ſtrange art in Shakeſpear "which can draw our liking toward ſo offenſive an object. He "has wit, it will be ſaid, chearfulneſs and humour of the moſt "characteriſtic ſort. And is this enough? Is the humour and "gaiety of vice ſo very captivating? Or does not the apparancy "of ſuch humour, and the flaſhes of ſuch wit, by more ſtrongly "diſcloſing the deformity of character, but the more effectually "excite our hatred and contempt of the man?"

THIS reaſoning, carried to its full extent, would prove one of theſe two things, either that Falſtaff was not a man of vicious morals, or that his wit and humour were not entertaining: but both are ſo palpably abſurd, that the critic qualifies the general aſſertion in this manner. "I am willing, however, to admit "that if a dramatic writer will but preſerve to any character "the qualities of a ſtrong mind, particularly courage and ability,

 "it

" it will be afterwards no difficult taſk to diſcharge that *diſguſt*
" which ariſes from vicious manners, and even to attach us to
" the cauſe and ſubject of our mirth with ſome degree of affection."
That Falſtaff is vicious, a rogue, a liar, and a profligate, is allowed on all hands; yet covered with all this infamy, he entertains, ſurpriſes and charms, nay he engages our hearts. What then? Shall an infuſion of cowardice reduce the character to a caput mortuum, and no ſpirit, no ſalt remain? For my part, I can ſee no reaſon for this. A man may, in my opinion, be very witty and pleaſant upon his own defects, and even upon ſuch qualities as, though acknowledged vices, cannot be deemed flagitious. Now cowardice, if it can be called by a harſher name than defect, will at leaſt be allowed to have in it nothing flagitious. It certainly gives a mean and contemptible idea of its poſſeſſor; but ſo do fraud and lying. But neither theſe, nor any other qualities beſtowed upon Falſtaff, are in their nature ſo far deteſtable, but that great endowments of mind, eſpecially if they be ſuch as univerſally charm, ſhall be able completely to diſcharge the diſguſt ariſing from them. Genius and wit never fail to recommend themſelves to the notice and admiration of mankind; and always throw a dignity round a character even above its true merit. Theſe principles are ſufficient to explain the ſuperior pleaſure and peculiar intereſt we feel in Falſtaff above all other characters which have not half his vices. His creative fancy, playful wit, characteriſtic humour, admirable judgment and nice diſcernment of character, are ſo rare and excellent endowments, that we loſe the exceptionable matter in contemplating them. Nor is it owing to theſe alone that we admire and almoſt love Falſtaff, but to another exquiſite contrivance of the poet in catching

catching occaſions of mirth from his very vices. Thus, by making them the ground into which he has wrought the moſt entertaining fancies and delightful humour, he has made it almoſt impoſſible to ſeparate matters thus cloſely interwoven, and has ſeduced judgment to the ſide of wit. Theſe are the ſtrange arts by which Shakeſpear has drawn our liking toward ſo offenſive an object; or to ſpeak with more preciſion, has contrived to veil the offenſive parts of his character. Defence is a thing of too ſerious a nature for Falſtaff; he laughs at all vindication; *creſcit ſub pondere virtus*; his elaſtic vigour of mind repels all difficulties; his alacrity bears him above all diſguſt; and in the gay wit we forget the contemptible coward.